Big Dreams in a Small Town

Ramona Romero lives in Loyalton, CA in Sierra County with her two young children. The population of Loyalton is just 769, making it the largest town in Sierra County. That being said, Sierra County is the second-least populous county in California making employment opportunities few and far between. Ramona was enrolled in the National Dislocated Worker Grant (NDWG) Storm program in June of 2017, after hearing about the prospects that the program could offer her, through Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD). The program was designed to help long-term unemployed and dislocated workers get temporary jobs to perform storm related clean-up and repair of public or private non-profits facilities that were affected by the damage done in the 2016-17 winter storms. Prior to enrollment, she had been unemployed for over two years and was looking to earn income while adding to her skills set and making her more marketable for future employment.

Ramona was chosen by Caltrans to assist with the removal and replacement of asphalt to city walkways and streets, operate a two-way radio for traffic control, perform auto control duties, as well as assisting with water culverts and drainage system repair, and various other tasks. Ramona took to the job from the start and was consistently praised for her hard work and incentive to work independently. Knowing that the program only offered temporary work, Ramona enrolled in the Youth Program with AFWD to continue her quest for full-time, permanent employment. The Youth Program assisted her with obtaining interview skills, updating her resume, and acquiring a career plan.
Recently, Ramona completed her temporary job with Caltrans. Caltrans states that “Ramona has been a great asset to our team at Beckwourth. She is a great worker; willing to learn, and will be greatly missed”. At their encouragement and with the help of her Career Advisor, Ramona has submitted an application for permanent work with Caltrans. Having worked for them in the program for the past six months and making a great impression, Ramona has a chance at achieving her goal.
The Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc. (AFWD) is always supporting its staff with continual trainings to service our program participants better because the world of workforce development is always evolving. On September 27, 2017, we met as a team for our Annual Meeting/Training at the Oroville office of AFWD. We engaged in interactive team-building activities covering information regarding our Target Sectors-Occupations and career paths, the effects on our participants who are coming from a poverty culture, engaging our audience with our presentations skills; and building a professional resume.

Key components included understanding and knowing who our partner agencies are and the programs we are required to partner with. Our focus was on the hallmarks of excellence that customers can receive from us as an America’s Job Center of California (AJCC). Our facility locations should enhance the customer experience. We do our utmost to ensure universal access, with emphasis on individuals with barriers. Our services support the One-Stop system through effective partnerships and customer-centered services. We want to present an on-ramp for skill development and credentialing to meet the needs of target sectors. As an AJCC, we actively engage employers and support regional sector strategies through an integrated business service strategy. Our staff are high quality, well-informed, and cross-trained to assist clients to the best of our abilities.

What made our meeting/training engaging and enjoyable was the wonderful presentations given by some of our own staff members. Jill Ghirardelli and Lisa Scott, Career Center Advisors (CCA) from our Chico office, did an insightful presentation covering the program that Youth Career Advisors had previously attended: “Bridges out of Poverty.” CCA Mark Alvidrez, gave a demonstration on “Presentation Tips.” With the onset of utilizing the 21st Century Curriculum, Mark’s presentation encouraged all of us to think outside the box in preparing our materials, engaging our audience, and staying open to the flow of information through the material presented and through our own experiences. CCA Sandy Wangberg provided a guide on “Professional Resumes.” This presentation was a great way to offer something more to our clients who want to facilitate the use of technology in locating a job position and showcasing a resume.

The afternoon session of our agenda included guest speakers from the Employment Development Department (EDD) Labor Market Information Division. Ignacio Magana, EDD Wagner-Peyser Employment Services, Michael McDonald, EDD Veteran Services, and Luis Alejo, EDD Labor Market Division, helped to demystify contact information, the latest research information, and enlighten all those present on what EDD Veteran Services can do for our participants and job searcher.

As staff members with the AFWD, we appreciate our Supervisors and Management’s willingness to build the knowledge base on a continual basis. It pulled us together as a team to share information, successes, and challenges to help serve our unique communities.
Alliance for Workforce Development Inc.’s (AFWD) Youth Program is always seeking ways to provide staff with the most current information and strategies to effectively serve our youth clients. On November 16, 2017, staff were treated to a full in-service training workshop on “Understanding and Working with Challenging Youth,” facilitated by Michael Perry, MSW.

Michael Perry has been working in the child and youth care field since 1973 as a direct care worker, social worker, supervisor, program director, and administrator. The course taught participants to begin to understand the psychological world of the traumatized youth that they work with and to learn strategies to calm and support our youth, and use a crisis as an opportunity for learning and growth. The training helped staff to identify life stressors for youth, how a client’s thoughts and perceptions influence behavior, to identify patterns of escalation and how to support youth in crisis.

He also explored the use of the Conflict Cycle as a tool to map out the progression of a crisis event and how to use the Conflict Cycle to debrief a problem with the client. Participants learned how reactions to a behavior can inadvertently create a negative response and a potential power struggle. The information participants agreed that this was very applicable and could potentially help to avoid misperceiving or misinterpreting the actions of our youth clients.
The ASCEND Program

The Alliance for Workforce Development Inc.’s (AFWD) Youth Program and many partnering agencies were treated to an extraordinary training on the Ascend Program. The Ascend Program was developed by two criminal defense attorneys who were tired of watching their clients return to the criminal system because of a lack of effective rehabilitation programs. Attorneys Christine Morse and Toni White wrote the program for Ascend in 2010 based on knowledge gained from years of working with offenders. They took the program to psychologists and researchers at Sacramento State University for academic curriculum insight and research evaluation.

Ascend is a holistic, evidence-based, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and legal educational program that uses professionals to transfer social capital to offenders, so that they could get beyond “ditch-digging” jobs and into more satisfying and lucrative areas of work and life. Yoga and healthy eating are integrated into the program. The trainers explained that an important element of the program was giving the offenders an understanding of probation terms and the law, so that they could change their behavior and not get picked up on nonviolent and non-serious, but very common, violations and causes for recidivism. The program is action-based and uses guest speakers, activities, and role plays to teach valuable social skills.

The program participants were given helpful tools to apply to justice-system involved youth utilizing their methods and beliefs, such as identifying decision fatigue, utilizing trauma-informed treatments, the trigger-event chain, and criminogenic risk factors. They participated in role-plays and played games to teach clients a hands-on method to impart the importance of a pro-social network. Mainly they reiterated a fact that AFWD’s Youth Staff know only too well; a program must be implemented with love for it to make an impact.
Sierra County
Total Visitors
216

Sierra County
Business Services
Businesses Served  21
Services Provided  23

AFWD
Total Clients
Enrolled
631

Unemployment Rate
(As of: November 2017)
Butte  4.8%      Nevada  3.4%
Lassen 4.9%     Plumas  7.5%
Modoc  7.1%     Sierra  4.7%